2

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ON PAGE A-11

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Westmoreland, CBS End War, Keep Quarreling

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NEW YORK, Feb. 18—The war ended today, but the combatants found it hard to lay down their arms.

Waiting in ABC's "green room" to go on the network's nightly news show, retired Army general William C. Westmoreland suddenly spotted his adversary, CBS reporter Mike Wallace, on the screen defending the 1982 documentary that accused Westmoreland of engaging in a "conspiracy" to suppress enemy-troop data during the Vietnam war.

"I still believe there was a conspiracy," Wallace's gravely voice came over the airwaves. "I believe it even more after so many people came forward to support CBS in that courtroom."

Westmoreland, his arms crossed, his famous jaw jutting firmly, shook his head.

"What a bunch of baloney," he said, seemingly with indignation.

After withdrawing from his $120 million lawsuit and ending his court battle with CBS just short of a verdict, Westmoreland today remained the steadfast and defiant soldier, clearly unbowed after 4½ months in a dark Manhattan courtroom.

Because neither side had emerged as a clear winner in court, both sides launched offenses where the battle had begun—in the news media. Westmoreland was getting in his first shots in an opening round of interviews.

Of CBS network officials who say that they might rebroadcast "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception": "tormentors."

Of CBS witnesses, many of them Army or Central Intelligence Agency officers: "they sat there regurgitating rumors and suppositions and myths and barracks gossip."

Of his former intelligence officer in Vietnam for almost two years, a friend he decorated, promoted and felt loyalty toward as a fellow West Pointer—retired general Joseph A. McChristian, who testified for CBS: "I never had any indication that he had a vendetta against me."

Anger seeped into Westmoreland's voice, and his face grew red.

"This totally perplexes me. It is perplexing to me, and it is also disillusioning to me. You know, loyalty is a trait for the military. I was loyal to him."

Of McChristian's testimony that Westmoreland refused to pass on higher enemy intelligence numbers because the new data would land like a "political bombshell" in Washington, Westmoreland said: "I saw him maybe 100 times in Vietnam and after that in Washington, and he never brought it up. I just don't understand it."

Of CBS witness Gains B. Hawkins, who was his chief of Order of Battle enemy estimates in Vietnam and who supported the views held by CBS consultant and co-defendant, Samuel A. Adams:

"He was a big boy. He had been in the service a number of years, and there was no indication he had been disgruntled until Sam Adams made 10 trips, maybe, down to Mississippi to talk to him. Then he suddenly develops this posture. All on his own."

Adams has said he and Hawkins talked for hours about the 1967 intelligence battle and that Hawkins had "a mental block" about the period when he suppressed higher data. On the stand Hawkins said he ordered his officers to pare enemy-troop numbers, an order he considered "improper."

Like some of those who once suggested that the United States should have declared victory and withdrawn from Vietnam 20 years ago, Westmoreland has withdrawn from his grueling trial, calling himself the conqueror. He said a CBS statement citing Westmoreland's "long and faithful service to his country" and saying that the network never intended to portray him as "unpatriotic or disloyal" counted as an apology by the network and cleared his name.

Westmoreland also defended his removal from the official enemy rosters two categories of personnel that he labeled "civilians." Known in military jargon as the "self-defense" and "secret self-defense" troops, these were children, women and the elderly who defended their hamlets with punji stakes and handmade bombs. Westmoreland said he thought that if they had been added to the enemy listings, it would have given the American forces in Vietnam a "license to kill," creating the possibility of more My Lai-style massacres in Southeast Asia.

"In effect you would have told your troops that they would have a right to go into villages and kill almost anybody they wanted."

Westmoreland, who has seldom talked to reporters since the trial began Oct. 9, seemed to relish the idea of being able to defend himself to reporters against witnesses for CBS who have been on the stand since the first week of January.

The general and his wife, Katherine, had sat for almost 50 days in a Manhattan courtroom, often listening to attempts to sully his career and impugn his judgment.

"At first you get angry," Westmoreland said. "You sit there and hear these outrageous things that make you furious. And then, you just get numb.

"I developed a callousness so that after a while it just went in one ear and out the other. It wasn't like real life."

Westmoreland said he will spend the next few days "trying to get this media exposure behind me," giving non-stop television interviews, firing verbal volleys at the network and its supporters.

"Then, like good generals, I'll just fade away."